

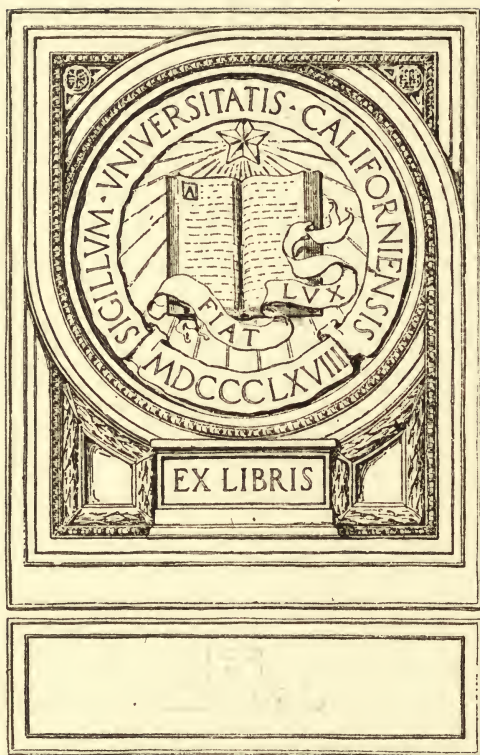
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BANNERS

BABETTE
DEUTSCH



B A N N E R S

-BABETTE DEUTSCH



B A N N E R S

BY

BABETTE DEUTSCH



NEW

YORK

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MAIN

**TO
MY MOTHER
AND
THE MEMORY OF MY FATHER**

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THE DANCERS

THE DANCERS

FROM the grey woods they come, on silent feet
Into a cone of light.

A moment poised,

A lifting note,

O fair! O fleet!

Whence did you come in your amazing flight?

And whither now

Do you, reluctant, wistfully retreat?

Oh surely you have danced upon the hills

With the immortals.

As an arrow thrills

Thru the blue air and sings,

You join with the proud wind, your fluent limbs

As tameless as his wings.

Within your hollowed hand you hold the draught

That wakes us from our lingering lethargy

To skyey joy

Like yours, luring and swift and free.

Yours is the birth in beauty that was sung

A golden age ago;

And now you come

BANNERS

THE DANCERS—*continued*

With pipe and timbrel and the quickening drum,
Till men have hope of conquest over time
And death and tears.
Dreams know not any bars.
You leap like living music thru the air
And love triumphant treads among the stars.

THE DANCERS

BACCHANAL

SLOWLY to the altar . . . slow,
As with heavy feet,
Bound by a woe foreknown,
Slowly we come.
Our arms bear high
Their bloomy burden, lift and loose them all;
We shake our limbs free in the purple fall
Of offering.
The dark is torn with a cry.

Oh we are mad,
We are drunk with wine of the god.
Our feet are athrill with the juice of the vine we
 have trod.
Our arms are upflung,
Our fingers are spread on the air;
The scent of the grape in our nostrils;
The wind in our hair.
We are mad with our maidenhood;
Night has come down on the hills.
We dance for the god

BANNERS

BACCHANAL—*continued*

Where the music of mystery fills
The hollows of earth, and the stars leap white in
the sky.

Our glad hands softly beat.
With beautiful stamping feet
We come.
With flying hair;
To face the awful joining,
Throat lifted, pale knees bare.

Slowly on the dark mountain-top
Moving,
More slowly now . . .
Faint and vague are our traces,
Trouble and halt in our paces
Where wan dawn follows close.
God, we are overthrown.
Night breaks, we lie alone.
Evoe! Dionysos.

THE DANCERS

ANNA

ARE there holier ones
Than these?
Is there a more fit altar for worship?
Limbs of a young Aphrodite;
The virgin torso;
Feet firmly planted,
Or lifted only in rhythm,
Beating the ground like the clear
Round golden notes of the cymbal;
Fingers that draw the heart
Like a flute that calls in the twilight;
Brows serious,
Serene,
Hair wind-blown and dark,
Lips that are parted slightly,
A wondering god's;
But this is a maiden. . . .
This is the flyng torch
For the maternal temple.

BANNERS

A GIRL

YOU also, laughing one,
Tosser of balls in the sun,
Will pillow your bright head
By the incurious dead.

THE DANCERS

EXILES

By what wind-loved grasses,
By what grey sea
Do they dwell,
The restless ones, forever returning
To the places their lovers remember?
They are a moment seen,
Tossing their golden balls,
Or running far, far
Beyond the sands where the skies vanish.
They come again
In the dawn twilight,
In the bird-broken silences.
But they are gone
Ungathered—
Cliff-flowers, . . .
The grace of foam
Lost in the bitter green waters.

EPHEMERIS

EPHEMERIS

EPHEMERIS

ABOVE the river in a summer swoon
Hangs the still air, and in the warm embrace
Of afternoon
We too lie dumbly, full of soft delight.
The grass is sweet to smell:
We suck the white
Fresh ends of it, and the green pleasant place
Where we are lapped seems with that faint taste
 sweeter
Than any poppied isle in remote seas
To some divinely drowsy lotus-eater.
Long, long
We lie, and have no care for any human thing,
Save for the snatch of song
Where, bathing gaily, tawny-bodied boys
Upfling
The water round them; or from a child at play
Floats the shrill ripple of laughter far away.
And then sharp stillness, pointed by the stir
Of little winds among the boughs, wherethru
The deep sky shines impenetrably blue.

BANNERS

EPHEMERIS—*continued*

Wrapped in that golden haze we weave at will
The scents and airs of summer's subtle loom;
Regretting but the moments as they pass,
The perished bloom
Of the wan day, that like the wind is gone;
And in the growing hush we watch her die;
And watch, beneath the same impersonal sky
The wimpled river flowing greyly on.

MARBLES

THE boys are playing marbles in the street;
 Crouched with gay eyes intent on the rough
 ground,
 Heedless of storming labyrinthal feet,
 Keen only for the lovely sound
 Of knocking balls
 And colors brightly blent.
 Glazed potties, blue and green and lavender,
 Gleam near pale stonies' warm eburnean;
 Like earth and splintered diamond, agates shine;
 Glassies are struck alive with sun;
 Blood-alleys glow like drops of frozen wine.
 Here beauty lies: a bracelet all unstrung
 For the March city
 While she smiles and stirs
 Above the eager gamble, knuckle-down, of her
 young jewellers.

Marbles, and March, the tossing wind, and the
 click
 Of ball on ball, and wild tumultuous cries,

BANNERS

MARBLES—*continued*

Anger and laughter, adventure!
A glance and a thumb's short flick:
Rubies and amber and lustrous Carrara to win.
Hope jigs in the heart.
White house-tops sail in the skies.
Romance winks from the dust where the colored
 alleys spin.

The clangorous traffic drowns the hurrying
 crowd's
Nervous relentless tread.
Sunset climbs down the clouds.
Day and the wind are dead.
There are separate ways in the dusk, and lonely
 shrill farewells.
To lamplit windows and his narrow bed
Each goes, a trifle wistful.
Yet each knows
Prodigious spells
To charm the hours between sun and sun.
The bulging pockets grin; the spoils in reach
Of gloating sight and touch all night must lie.
Each has by heart their palpable smooth speech,
Their singing colors' lullaby.

EPHEMERIS

MARBLES—*continued*

Marbles, and March, and the dreams of a soft

Spring night:

Prizes of amber and ivory, lapis and jade.

An arrow of moving light. . . .

They rouse at the joyous noise

Of kissing balls

To the thrill of games unplayed.

BANNERS

TRAILS

WHERE grey-limbed timber mingled whispering
boughs,

The forest shadow splintering the sun,
Warm-eyed and suddenly very young, you stood.
Palpitant nostrils breathed the smell of wood:

"Growing, or fresh-cut,
It's the smell of home."

You moved and put your arms around a tree
And laughed at me.

And the boy you were,
From the highest branch that bore his weight,
laughed back.

Then swinging free,
You were a man again,
Taking me down the wild-grown track
To the fishing-brook where Spring would find you,
Forgetful of the jerking hook,
Conjuring out of the dusk behind you
The genii and the heroes of your book.

"This little brook is a feeder of the river,"
You said, and with strange adult gravity

EPHEMERIS

TRAILS—*continued*

Led me beyond the pebble-bottomed stream
With wise talk of log-rolling, pretty grains,
And strong, elastic beams.
Your voice, caressing
The woods you named, echoed a boy's
Excited treble, and recalled the boy
Leaping and like a leaf aquiver
With joy, since he was going up the river
To spend a week-end at the lumber-camp.
That was a place of magic, if you like.
Hard bunks, coarse food (the bread in peasant-
 hunks
Like fairy-tales), the huge rough strength of men,
The early morning hours as fresh and cool
As if earth had been dipped into a pool
And still were dripping with it.
Best, the times when they were busiest,
Too busy to be mindful of a boy,
And only flung the word: "Watch out, there!"
 when
They tightened ropes, let big chips fly, and then
Cleared for the monstrous crashing, loud and
 clean.
It had your mark on it, one branching oak:
The trunk was like a totem with its signs.

BANNERS

TRAILS—*continued*

But when the boughs rubbed and the leafage spoke
With wind, the sound was like the soft slow roar
Of ocean breaking on a distant shore.
The forest thinned and vanished, the sky changed;
The boy was nowhere, and the man estranged.
I stood perplexed in your familiar haunts,
An alien;
Time, with subtle taunts, had banished me outside
the magic wood.
Wonderfully,
All the bright life that we had known together:
The concert-rooms, the gossip,
The mad weather
We tramped thru gaily,
The fencing over cigarettes and tea,
The sweet fierce quarrels in the gallery. . . .
Paled, faded, was the memory of a mood.
Only the boy was real, and he had fled,
And you had followed him.
But you are dead.

EPHEMERIS

GENRE

THE undulant wind-shadowed water lips
The weather-bitten wharf.
Like anchored phantoms, ships
Swing out from the warped slips, with a drowsy
 rhythm
As of insects singing.
Inland, the sunwarmed smell of grass
Comes softly on.
There is a presence as of hours that pass
In silence, and inhumanly are gone.
The grey haze does not lift.
The river is wood-colored like the pier.
A lonely shed
Down by the water's edge gleams harshly red.
The tide is full . . . the worn piles heave and
 drift.

BANNERS

GARDENS

INTO the dropping sun as into a warm flower
The strong sun breaks.
Petals on glowing petals shower
In gorgeous rain,
Crimsoning windows, dyeing the passionless city
With wild pomegranate stain.
The tropic hour
Fades slowly,
Slowly the evening flower
Puts forth its luminous blues and lucent jades,
Opening only to withdraw and close
Before the unfolding of night's velvet rose,
Trembling with starry dew.
Gold is the scentless garden of the sky,
Imperishably bright.
Yet we who lie under its glory, crushing the young
grass,
Turn from it, as from beauty in a glass,
To the flowers that spring near us, that will die.

EPHEMERIS

OMBRES CHINOISES

THE city misted in rain, dim wet flashes of light
Strike thru the dusk; vaguely thunders a train;
The cabs rattle and slip over the glimmering street.
Under the wheels and hooves and hurrying feet
The darkly shining pave
Reaches into the night.
On blackness color flames: purple and blurs of
red
Like fruits of faery bloom,
Yellow soft as honey and gold, green as tho
crushed emeralds bled,
Arctic blue in pale cold ribbons
Lost in gloom.

Wind, and across the shaken lanterns
The obscure shadows loom.

BANNERS

DISTANCE

Two pale old men
Sit by a squalid window playing chess.
The heavy air and the shrill cries
Beyond the sheltering pane are less
To them than roof-blockaded skies.
Life flowing past them:
Women with gay eyes,
Resurgent voices, and the noise
Of pedlars showing urgent wares,
Leaves their dark peace unchanged.
They are innocent
Of the street clamor as young children bent
Absorbed over their toys.
The old heads nod;
A parchment-colored hand
Hovers above the intricate dim board.
And patient schemes are woven, where they sit
So still,
And ravelled, and reknit with reverent skill.
And when a point is scored

EPHEMERIS

DISTANCE—*continued*

A flickering jest
Brightens their eyes, a solemn beard is raised
A moment, and then sunk on the thin chest.
Heedless as happy children, or maybe
Lovers creating their own solitude,
Or worn philosophers, content to brood
On an intangible reality.
Shut in an ideal universe,
Within their darkened window-frame
They ponder on their moves, rehearse
The old designs,
Two rusty skull-caps bowed
Above an endless game.

BANNERS

SMOKE

BECAUSE it is evening,
Because the last light lies
In fading warmth on the housefronts and the grey
street,
Because the night clouds are overcoming the
skies,
The air comes sweet
With the savor of a rare and delicate wine.
Ambiguously I repeat
The vain old pageant's movements, nor resist
The soft demands of eyes.
On a loud corner I may pause to stare
After the massed backs of the moving throng;
Swing to the syncopation of a song;
Listen to the chatter of hurrying feet;
And send delicate smoke into the air,
Regarding the first lamps on the pale thorough-
fare.
I snuff the dust mingled with the perfume
Of women of fashion;
Taste night's early breath,

EPHEMERIS

SMOKE—*continued*

And the city's bloom.
Because life is so barren of passion,
I would sense death.
Beauty passes like smoke on the wind, and delight
Is sharp as the last puff of an exquisite cigarette.
And should I fret because the vulgar night,
With lost emotions and stale poignancies,
Stabs with the chill acuteness of a knife
Offering life?

BANNERS

ROMANCE

There are shy woods
Of quickening thin boughs,
Pale jade, alive.

There is a wind,
A tempest and a roar of beaten waters,
Agape with laughing fangs.

There is a darkness,
Tender, terrible.
Gestic, or I remember. . . ?

EPHEMERIS

TWO HOKKUS

ANSWER

You ask for a hokku.
Ask for silence, rather.
It is like trying to ride past the sun.
It is like the words of farewell
Before a final parting.

SCREEN PATTERN

The hounding wind
Runs shrieking thru the dark.
From a black cloud
The moon gleams like a tiger
Amber-eyed.

SHOWER

From the clear melancholy sky
The rain
Drops in long shaken sheets,
And softly hops on the wide, glistening streets,
And dully flows
Through emptied thoroughfares,
Where a few solitary cabs parade
Like slow defeated ghosts none living knows,
For whom none living cares.
Till lightning quivers and harsh thunder breaks
On startled ears
And wakes
Old wonders and old fears.
The huddled folk
Stare outward at wind-swollen gusts
And the down-driven smoke,
And at the sky,
Defended by complacent surety
Of a near hour when they need not pause
For drenching winds and bolts beyond their laws.

"TO AN AMIABLE CHILD"

You were an amiable child.
 Not as the other children were,
 Petulant, pouting,
 You would wear your half-grown wisdom
 With an air of humor;
 And you laughed less than you smiled.
 And you were largely tolerant
 Of company and rainy days and common games
 you did not want.
 You were so still, but radiant
 When life was good.
 And more than food or play,
 Music you loved, and motion and
 Beauty you could not understand
 In voice and face and golden weather.
 Yet sometimes for whole days together
 You wore your silence like a shield;
 You who could yield
 As graciously to death as to your nurse
 At bedtime, hopeful of prodigious dreams.
 Now here you lie.

BANNERS

"TO AN AMIABLE CHILD"—*continued*

But too unmindful of sweet dreams or waking,
For all the birdsongs and the blossoms breaking
Above your grave,
Or wondering strangers making
What tale beseems your faint quaint epitaph.
Now rank sods cover
The dust of lovely limbs, and all the show
Of your beloved ways is strangely over.
Yet there's some comfort in the world to know
That you were dear and fair, and still must be
Remembered so.

THE DEATH OF A CHILD

ARE you at ease now,
 Do you suck content
 From death's dark nipple between your wan lips?
 Now that the fever of the day is spent
 And anguish slips
 From the small limbs,
 And they lie lapped in rest,
 The young head pillowed soft upon that indurate
 breast.

No, you are quiet,
 And forever,
 Tho for us the silence is so loud with tears,
 Wherein we hear the dreadful-footed years
 Echoing, but your quick laughter never,
 Never your stumbling run, your sudden face
 Thrust in bright scorn upon our solemn fears.
 Now the dark mother holds you close; . . . o, you
 We loved so,
 How you lie,
 So strangely still, unmoved so utterly,
 Dear yet, but oh a little alien too.

BANNERS

SEA-MUSIC

THERE is a place of bitter memories
Dreary and wide and lonely as the sea,
Foaming and moaning; there they come to me
Like wild gulls crying sea-taught monodies; . . .
Iron-winged hours, heavy, heavy with dread;
Dawn after death; the sound of a shut door;
And shining love that has a withered core;
The eyes of those who fight and starve for bread.
There is doom, and change, and silence, and deny-
ing;
Memories of these pluck at the heart of me.
And over the bitter roar of the old dumb sea
The air is filled with the noise of wild gulls
crying.

EPHEMERIS

HARMONICS

I HAVE come here to be free for an hour or two,
To relinquish to a darkness richly lit,
To the silken movement of infiltrating crowds,
The music, the noisy thrill of dischords preluding
it,—

The morning's fret and the night's restless argument.

The quarrelling strings and the dim stage are kind,
Rest is in the curtain's velvet fall.

Lovely indifferent strangers put poverty out of
the mind.

The mutter of traffic is exquisitely drowned
By the low bright liquid swell of belling sound.
I forget . . .

The miles of mud,

The barren world of mud

And fire; pulling at the boots and biting at the
flesh.

The watery world

Of sinking corpses.

The filthy dawns,

BANNERS

HARMONICS—*continued*

The flames that crack darkness open and limbs
 apart.
The monstrosousness of the unthinkable dead,
The unthinkable living.
The estrangement from known face and places,
The going home to a heap of stones;
The monotonous machinery of hell.
I had forgotten. . . .
The music abruptly stopped,
Chatter arose and applause. I was aware
Of moving heads, of the close fragrant air,
The flutter of a programme dropped.
I had forgotten the concert-hall
And why I was there.
I passed to the red-lamped exit,
And hearing the newsboys cry
Beckoned.
The pennies jingled; all at once it seemed
Terrible to live,
But curious to die;
And over the music and under the roar of the
 street
The headlines were nothing but print that
 screamed.

EPHEMERIS

HARMONICS—*continued*

There was a sound of war
And of defeat.

I stood there staring at the sunset sky.

SONGS AND SILENCES

SONGS AND SILENCES

SONGS

I WOULD make songs for you:
Of slow suns weighing
Thru pale mist to the river, overlaying
Gold upon silver tissue; or the hush
Of winter twilight when the bushes quiver
Blooming with birds;
Of the easy snow;
Of patient streets, or the theatric glow
Of lamps on crowding faces in the night;
Of sudden gay encounters without words;
Of sorrow quiet in a huddled fight;
Of the release of April winds;
Of death,
That is a stillness without peace,—
Like love, wherefor I am so dumb to you.

BANNERS

SILENCE

SILENCE with you is like the faint delicious
Smile of a child asleep, in dreams unguessed:
Only the hinted wonder of its dreaming,
The soft, slow-breathing miracle of rest.
Silence with you is like a kind departure
From iron clangor and the engulfing crowd
Into a wide and greenly barren meadow,
Under the bloom of some blue-bosomed cloud;
Or like one held upon the sands at evening,
When the drawn tide rolls out, and the mixed
light
Of sea and sky enshrouds the far, wind-bellowed
Sails that move darkly on the edge of night.

SONGS AND SILENCES

FROM THE FERRY

THE wind blew salty from the bay,
Darkly the river rose,
Lights on the farther shore were pale
As when the first star shows.

Our faces lifted to the night,
The air was like a boon;
We were as close as lovers are,
And alien as the moon.

BANNERS

WALLS

THE cliffs were terrible. Black flint
Rearing upon the sky;
In futile patterns shadowy boughs
Laced their immensity.

We moved at the dark granite foot;
In our old bantering tone
We talked and laughed. Beside us, truth
Stood with a face of stone.

SONGS AND SILENCES

DAWN

OVER hushed lawns a pale grey arch,
Vague walls took sharper form;
Beyond, the quiet water lay,
Flickering dark and warm.

Farther, the city: clustered lights,
Dimmed where the sky-line glows;
Sleep hovered on the freshened air;
You laughed . . . the new sun rose,

BANNERS

CANDLES

Joy lights the candles in my heart
When you come in, until it seems
The racing flames must fill the room
With Marathons of gleams.

The place where we are met is gay
And glowing with the darting rout,
Till going, you swing wide the door,
And blow them out.

SONGS AND SILENCES

LURES

SWART rusty pine-boughs hold
Thin threads of pallid gold.
At the white high-road's turn
Coppery bushes burn.
The sky is clear and green.
The light is hard and keen.
But sharper, shriller, cries
Your absent face . . . your eyes.

BANNERS

SEA-PIECE

DUNES overthrown by the wind lie prone to the
twilight;
Held in the foam-darkened hollows and softly
moving
Over the pallid sea-marge in slow resurgence
Whispers the ocean.

Threads of foam in the fine sands lingering faintly
Sink as we watch. The touch of the air is colder.
Swift the oncoming clouds. Your lips upon my
lips
Salt with the sea-wind.

SONGS AND SILENCES

PRELIBATION

GHOSTLY scent of boughs that stir in the darkness,
Fresh the fine dark dew, the thick stars distant,
Earth one star that swings in the luminous
 heavens:

These are our terror.

Blind and bright, they look upon nameless lovers;
In their light the ravishing years are looming;
You must go from my arms. One will take you,
Death, or estrangement.

SONNETS

SONNETS

THE SILVER CHORD

A FROSTY silence, blank as the wide spaces
Of drifted snow, broods on the brilliant air.
Green lakes of ice lie in the white embraces
Of wind-swept meadows, under skies as bare.
Beyond, shrouded in smoky rose, the hills.
A pale, bright sun, enmeshed in sombre boughs,
Threads these with ruddy haze. And quiet fills
The hollows where the shadow-bringers drowse.
Quiet is resonant as some deep bell;
Beauty like music echoes in the brain.
The snow-lit clarity is palpable.
Here is profound appeasement . . . here is pain.
Only the infinite impersonal moves
So poignantly the finite heart that loves.

BANNERS

SIC SEMPER

HUSH broods on the pale fields under the spell
Of the dim sky and its half-hearted stars.
Only the dwindling winds in their soft swell
Stir the dark boughs and their flung shadow-bars.
All hidden lights, all muffled noises seem
To lie beyond the grey horizon's edge.
Here is the timeless silence of a dream,
And we two ghosts who keep a wordless pledge.
But with so small a warning, suddenly
Fragrance swoops down upon us like a storm
That leaves us clutching, clinging humanly;
With your two arms about me, tense and warm.
And the sweet night is hid, as by a wall,
And love, low-voiced, fierce-fingered love is all.

SONNETS

SOLITUDE

THERE is the loneliness of peopled places:
Streets roaring with their human flood; the crowd
That fills bright rooms with billowing sounds and
 faces,
Like foreign music, overshrill and loud.
There is the loneliness of one who stands
Fronting the waste under the cold sea-light,
A wisp of flesh against the endless sands,
Like a lost gull in solitary flight.
Single is all up-rising and down-lying;
Struggle or fear or silence none may share;
Each is alone in bearing, and in dying;
Conquest is uncompanioned as despair.
But I have known no loneliness like this,
Locked in your arms and bent beneath your kiss.

THE UNDELIVERED

OUT of the night an angry woman crying,
A typist clicking on, the clink of glass,
Laughter, a tenuous music, all denying
The whole dark silence of the sky. These pass;
The lighted windows blacken, one by one;
The stealthy noises of the late hours cease;
Anger and business, mirth and love are done;
Safe in sleep's umber envelope of peace.
Safe, as in death, they lie; tho with day's breaking
They stir uneasy limbs once more, and know
The dull familiar trouble of awaking,
And all night's soft forgettings swift to go.
They have had release; but the unsleeping, these
Are prisoners who have thrown away the keys.

SONNETS

ATHANATOS

WHEN you have known the swing of every ship;
Obeyed brute winds on loud enormous seas;
Lingered to watch the hungry waters lip
Bold foreign quays; and wearied of all these:
Wearied of changing lights and changing faces,
And the perennial sun, rising and setting;
Rapt from the lure of unfamiliar places,
Adventure will be finding and forgetting.
After a hundred cities' shifting streets,
After lost landmarks, charred with blackened fire,
When pulses falter, shamed by small defeats,
There is an end of labor and desire.
Art fades, wars fail, and shrinking tides depart;
Nothing endures but the compassionate heart.

BANNERS

SEVERANCE

IN the fierce rhythm of love we two were swung
As tho to hidden music, while the flood
Of our insurgent passion throbbed and sung
To the staccato thrilling of our blood.
All else was silence: silence in the trees,
Deep silence in the meadows, and the sky
One vast dark arch of silence. All these
Quiet before our close-locked bodies' cry.
Yet a rebellious brain could question still,
Weaponed with fear and with proud reason, come
To thwart and torture love's blind-lidded will,
To sunder those strained limbs, quivering and
dumb.
And I could taste estrangement in your kiss;
Embraced, we could yet seek, and seeking, miss.

SONNETS

THE PERFECTIONIST

AMONG the vain confusion of the crowd
He bore like wind, with sudden music fraught;
Following beauty like a fiery cloud
Beyond to the far, frozen peaks of thought.
As ice, his lucid passion burned and shone,
Wherein he saw the vulgar pageant pass:
The shadow of God, and kindling, stared upon
His own stern image wavering in the glass.
The vision broke. Crashing in fragments round
him,
His insubstantial universe came down.
His mirrored self was splinters to confound him,
He struggled blindly, seeing himself drown.
But the dark face of God he sought to see
Wore death's grotesque familiarity.

BANNERS

TO RANDOLPH BOURNE

So you are dead. Forever foreign now;
Yet more accessible than when you moved,
With awkward ambling steps and ominous brow,
Among the furniture of life you loved.
You were so fragile and so pitiless;
The games we played with you were rich in dread:
You had a devil—and a god, I guess.
Now you are proud no longer, being dead.
You scorned the ivory tower, yet obeyed
Truth with most monkish fervor, in a cell
Cramped as your joys. And precious as a maid,
Your lonely mind was incorruptible.
Your diamond flame burned keen; but now you
are
Familiar as the fire of a star.

SONNETS

REDEMPTION

LIKE children wakeful in the night, alert
For some sad sound of the deserted street,
We too discard our toys, and stare, inert,
At walls of black estrangement and defeat.
We sicken with the sound and smell of war.
Among our best, devouring fingers thrust;
And life is hateful, bitter at the core.
The world goes out—a candle in a gust.
We are in the dark, and terrified or tired,
As those who move, with groping hands, to bed,
Rather than any joy we once desired,
We crave the long blind void of being dead.
But in a curving limb, a choric cry,
Beauty throbs stronger than the will to die.

BANNERS

BANNERS

BANNERS

(“The national colors, with their eagles, have given place to plain red flags, one of which floats over the famous Winter Palace, where the Duma will now meet.” Newspaper clipping; March, 1917.)

WHEN on the sun-spawned earth
First the mothering light
Dawned on her dark,
What stirred in the dark?
The brute was groping there,
Lured from his rock-hewn home
By the beckoning spark.
A slow, earth-smattered thing,
With the smell of the earth on his hair—
His, in the dawn of the world,
His, in a cave impearled,
His was the first great spring
To the red dawn, to the fire.
The caves are buried.
The mammoth-hunter

BANNERS

BANNERS—*continued*

Is dust upon the dust he trod.
Yet here upon a richer sod
The serf of later ages, burnt with toil,
Stood free,
And saw the fruits of his own soil
Glowing like dawn.
And here the cities see
Among their clustering lights and smoke, new
days,
New freedoms, and new slavery.
But now, as from beneath the deep earth-floor
The seed of flame beats upward, raging higher,
Now breaks the noise of people roused to war,
Who take their own like fire.
Their flag is fire:
Color of the red sun
On the horizon of the cave-man; one
With the color that is spilled over the earth
In every battle, with every shuddering birth.
Blood of the beaten slave, of the faithful crucified,
Blood sapped from the worker, blood of all who
died
To nourish the new soil wherefrom should spring
The unknown desired thing.
This flag a nation takes, to stud

BANNERS

BANNERS—*continued*

The battle-fields with beauty.
Oh when you behold it whipping in the wind,
Color of dawn and of your own heart's blood,
Soldiers,
Will you not rise
From earth-trench and sea-hollow where you keep
Your tryst with death,
And wake out of your sleep,
And see with the cave-man's eyes
That the day is here, and this is the sunrise!
Come, as the brute from the dark, with a mighty
 leap
To the red dawn, to the light.

BANNERS

THE CHALLENGER

I SHALL give you the keys to the gates of the four
winds,
To the temple of the sun.
The ocean arches
Will fall,
The night will crumble.
Cities of men will lie, puny toys, to your hand.

In the palpitant earth,
In the clashing of waters,
Crying in the quenchless skies
Rises your will.
Red, a leaping fire;
Cold, a sword.

Am I a god that you worship?
A lover that you pant toward me?
Am I death, whose lap is slumber?
You do not know me.
In the void you seek,
In the furtive darkness,

BANNERS

THE CHALLENGER—*continued*

In pain, glory, adventure.
I cast time behind me, the rind of the fruit,
I go naked and happy
To the fearless peaks,
The brooding.

You do not see
The night of the womb.
You do not hear
The voice of the lightning.
You do not clasp
The body of war.

I shall bring you to the gates of the four winds.
I shall open to you the temple of the sun.

BANNERS

ALIENS

THE mad go softly
Hidden in terror.
Their fear protects them.

Yet they are lonely.

Oh, lonely ones,
Who heed neither
Harsh skies nor cruel people
Who go, dancing or crying,
Forever solitary,
You I love better
Than the sane,
Who are one voice and one movement of multi-
tudes.

You, Tamerlane,
Astride Asia,
You with the whip;
You living secretly
With shame, the dark bedfellow;

BANNERS

ALIENS—*continued*

You, on the fringe of the crowd,
Fleeing the empty day;
You in the dark of the wind
On the sounding mountains.

You have no commerce with death,
The world-devourer, the worshipped,
You are alone.
Night hides in your eyes.
Silence
Clasps you.

The mad do not hunger.
In them is chaos crying.
Their flesh does not yearn with a sweet ache.
They would hold the sun from the heavens.
The mad do not sleep.
Their destroying laughter
Breaks their dreams.

The mad go softly
Hidden in terror.
Their fear protects them.

BANNERS

KING'S PARK

ONE by one they come into the room,
Silent, strange, with incurious glances.
Some are gay, with a child's irrelevant laughter,
But most, shut off
From the winter sunlight and the sound of human
 voices,
Incredibly remote.
One schemes for wealth; one boasts, remembering
Gossip and rhymes and lovers of old time,
Till like a wilful girl she runs away,
A childish joke upon her hanging lip.
But the dreadful dignity of one
Is consummated by his utter stillness.
His pale eyes fix an immanent world,
No flicker
Of light, no needle-point of pain
Reaches him where he stays, removed, immobile,
Bound by what grief none knows,
Or if a wanderer in some dread labyrinth none
 penetrates
Its great blind wall.

BANNERS

KING'S PARK—*continued*

Trembling old men, and dull-eyed boys, and
 women
Who have outlived a lingering prettiness,
They are all here,
Silly and wild and mute, but all are mad.
All chatter out of tune
With time and memory;
All play with broken toys, ardors and fears
That have no meaning in them.
All their eyes
Are bent on vacancy or on the ground
As tho to pull out of blank space the thing
They clutch at, but can never touch.
They are the prisoners of their own souls,
Dwelling in a yet more horrid jail
Than even human savagery builds for human
 savages to suffer in.
Well, and are they for this a race apart
From those who pity and hate their tragic case?
Has none of these slain his own children, none
Been plundered or else plundered prudently?
Has never one
Lost virtue or courage, maybe failed in both?
Has none if such befell
Not borne the burden? Or have all been still,

BANNERS

KING'S PARK—*continued*

Serene, and brave, nor cared for anything
That happened to them in their careful lives?
That's a blind alley. But one thing is plain:
There are walls too thick for intercourse, and
 walls
Too thin for privacy, and walls
Not to be climbed this side eternity; and we all
 live in walled cities.
There's a sound of festival
Or there's a noise of war,
And sometimes shattered stones come tumbling
 down
And leave us in an open desolate place
Where nothing moves
But fear.

BANNERS

JUNE: 1917
(CLASS DAY POEM)

As one who from the dark
Star-crowded sky
Turns, to renew his sense
Of the rough earth he knows, and human faces,
So from the vasts of wisdom we stand back,
Amazed by searching impotence.
But as the man who stares into the void
Cannot forget
The wonder and the hush and the desire
Of the stupendous spaces pricked with fire,
We grope among our commonplaces,
Star-blinded yet.
For we have seen
Out of time's ashen dawn, the brute
Clamber along his lonely cliffs, to light
The fire that would not die till it had fought
Slow centuries of night,
And shown
The first man's passionate children struggling on
Fiercely to goals unknown.

BANNERS

JUNE: 1917—*continued*

Shut from the personal battle, we have striven
With all the war-scarred nations, and been driven
Across all weathered continents and seas.
And breathless, we have watched the alchemies
Of all the wonder-workers.
We have heard
Oceans throbbing shells
With every word and pulse of truth.
And words have been
Our toys and tools.
Whatever we have wrought
Has been in the enkindling strife of thought.
But now the sun
Marks off the day with shadows.
We must go
From our golden playground,
Into the streets of unfamiliar woe
And miserable death.
Yet we have watched
The stars leap from the mother-orb,
And man, rejoicing in the earth that bore him,
run
To worship, dancing.
And those few,
By whose heroic gesture the world broke

BANNERS

JUNE: 1917—*continued*

From slavery,
We have beheld them too,
And something in us woke
Once
That will wake again at the thought of these.
And there will stir in us at the memories
Of them
The old strong will,
We shall have done with the ancient agonies.
Something there is in us to answer the thrill
Of things untried, and a dream like a flag un-
furl'd
Beckoning on, wins the youth in us still,
The spirit, moving ever to things unseen,
Moving us too,
Youth overcoming the world!

BANNERS

THE NEW DIONYSIAC

TAWNY, swift, silent, comes
October, with her nights like tightened drums.
The hunter stalks the hills. . . .
Thrown to the great blind sky
Shrills the new Dionysiac, and beats
The old, nocturnal cry.

Thru the deep mountains sound
Echoes like autumn thunder,
Storming of feet that hound,
Voices of joy that wound
Men's minds with savage wonder.

Out of the ancient years
Plucked from the mystic vine,
Plucked with a sword for shears,
Pressed with brooding and tears,
Theirs is the utter wine.

The unforgotten places,
The paths that their sisters trod

BANNERS

THE NEW DIONYSIAC—*continued*

Are theirs, and the woven traces
Theirs, and under their paces
The very body of God.

The winds and the night, the fire and the singing
fail.

The fury falters, the dancers falter and cease.
They have crowned the darkness with splendor;
With a red veil
They have bound the brows of the hills;
And filled the night
With torches and triumph, with laughter and
lifted knees.

Out of the tumult of the darkness, dawn
Comes, wan as these,
With wine-red feet unshod.
Sprung from the death they scattered, as a god
In terror and beauty:
Peace.

BANNERS

BEAUTY

BEAUTY is kindled like a fire
Flung on our common moments:
A bright spur
To wingless, lapsed desire.
She is briefly seen
In the untarnished sky,
And in the liquid amber and evening green,
Or in blue-glooming dusk that falls
As a madonna-cloak, and holds
The hushed world wound
In blue voluptuous folds.
She is not married to the stars,
But glows
In rusty boughs that stain the quiet snows;
In pearly streets, dim-lit;
In shop-windows
Shining with glamorous things that cry for touch
And thrilling ownership.
All rainy nights are hers.
She vastly flows
In frozen rivers slow to find the sea.

BANNERS

BEAUTY—*continued*

And in the moving wind invisibly
Unstable stirs.
And she is caught
In music, vibrant in the violin,
In the full choir
And the unequal, thin
Chant of a child, and in young laughter or
Words singing on a wire.
She leaps with fluent limbs
And subtly lies
In gesture and the tangent beam of eyes.
She wavers in slow eddying bands of smoke,
In glimmering shape, and in the rhythmic stroke
Of swimmers. And her breath
Is fresh with forest-smells.
Twisted in sinuous roots, or bodiless
On friendly odors borne,
And like the autumn sky alight with death,
Great beauty dwells.
But tho she wear the very sign of doom,
Like Bacchus' broken body scattered far,
She yet shall work her will
And in recurrent wonder she shall bloom.
Not the unchanging godhead, the fixed star,
But the windy torch, and the pulse and thrill
That all eternal are.

BANNERS

PSALM FOR THE NEW ZION

LIFT up your voices, daughters of Zion!
Sing and rejoice with cymbals.
Bind with fillets of silver, with leaves of gold
And flowers of lapis and coral
The brows that are smiling.
Sound the low drums now.
Blow the pipes for the dancing.
Zion is risen again,
Zion as a queen who was sleeping,
Zion as a conqueror home from the heavy wars.
For the years of your exile are done.
From the footless route of the dunes,
From the aching dark of the Ghettos,
From the place of the scourge,
Emerging,
A moving river of faces,
Proud blood that dumbly shouts,
You return
To the tents of your fathers,
To the fields that mock the sunset skies with their
beauty,

BANNERS

PSALM FOR THE NEW ZION—*continued*

To the mountains that rise like the sisters of happy
giants,
The mist-woven mountains of joy.
Is it more than a dream. . . .
In the shadow of the olives
To look on the vine-wrapped hillocks
Where the wine ripens in silence;
To rest and to hear far off
The soft song of the peasants;
To ignore the gates of the pale
At the sound of the twilight bell;
To lean on the bridge and care for no one who
passes;
To give your wisdom the sinews of strength;
To put the seal of the Pharaohs on the finger of
your young wisdom.
Sing, daughters of Zion,
Sing and rejoice in the streets.
For your mother is come, who was mourned for
As Joseph in Egypt,
Sold to the thieves to be a slave of the nations;
Her brothers look upon Zion,
Giver of loaves and honey,
The companion of princes.

BANNERS

PSALM FOR THE NEW ZION—*continued*

Zion is wakened, is risen.
His eyelashes wet with the dew-fall.
His limbs are girdled with lilies,
His loins with the sheep-skin.
His mouth is sweeter than roses,
And his hair thick as the grape-leaves.
Zion comes down from the mountains.
In his breast there is slumber;
But his heart is hot as the desert,
Fierce as beasts in the thicket
His riotous blood.
Zion stands in the sun.
Go, greet him with music,
Clap your hands and your anklets.
Dance till your garments flutter like white doves
in the sunshine.
He will give you young males
Like lions.
He will give you daughters like lilies,
His kiss is honey and fire.
Lift up your voice, oh Zion,
For he returns as a lover
Thru the eager dark,
Like music;

BANNERS

PSALM FOR THE NEW ZION—*continued*

The heart of the night is a song;
And the morning
Over the wild bright mountains
Moves like a dancer.

BANNERS

ZORKA

"So the Orient door
Was bolted by the Turk.
Spices and ivory, black slaves, Chinese jades:
The prizes Europe hungered for,
Locked fast, until the last Crusades
Belligerent for the cross that was the key. . . ."

But a thousand years have passed
Since that was told.
History seems a tarnished age of gold.
Time goes so slowly, there is so much suffering,
So many scatterings, and such small ease in tears
For the monstrous things
Of a thousand years.

Now the old kings are fled.
They have gone in a sudden panic from their
 thrones.
Death plays the triangle upon their bones.
But the dark multitudes
Who slowly file to the red funeral

BANNERS

ZORKA—*continued*

Drown out his music with their conquerors' tread,
Singing, with bloody banners over the common
dead.

Imperial majesty is fallen away
To a purple cloak over a little clay.
And holiness is gone from sacred places.
Kaiser and czar, sultan and shah and sheik
Are broken figure-heads upon the tide
Of Bolshevik insurgence, in its wide, red flood
From Petrograd, from Samarkand. . . .
Europe holds Asia with a rope of sand.

Out of earth's rocky craters,
Blind with grime,
From the dark furrows lifting startled brows,
When the vast wheels and the hungry machines
are still,
Men listen to the striking of a new time
Bolder than all the guns.
In the grim dawn it sounds,
And with the sun's slow whitening breaks upon
the millions sleeping,
And wakes them to old wounds,
And to a silence louder than all weeping.

BANNERS

ZORKA—*continued*

The East is red once more,
Redder than war,
As from the iron vigil, 'morning lifts
A beautiful rebellious head.

BANNERS

ET LE BON DIEU PENSA . . .

BEING past His first youth,
When He had used strong hands
To rend the dark,
And blown on the stars like coals,
Being past the time
When He had swung earth by its fiery strands,—
And seeing the little playthings He had wrought:
Finished stone honey-combs,
And the splendor of His thought
Borne in frail ships looping the seven seas,
God sat and smiled
At the games that He had loved when God was a
child.
But now He was tired. He was middle-aged,
And He did not care
To build proud cities out of fluted sands,
To traverse space for the sake of the sky's red
fruit,
Or boisterously to shout
Like a young giant holding
The world by its bright hair.

BANNERS

ET LE BON DIEU PENSA—*continued*

He sat down in heaven
Smoking hugely in His chair.
But there were one or two things that troubled
God.

He still remembered His youth with joy,
Tho He knew He had been less happy as a boy
Than when He was older.
But His griefs, like His other passions, had
grown colder.

He smoked, and pondered on His universe.
It was not like His plan,
Perhaps not worse, . . .

And yet, He stared at the earth
And suddenly He shook with wonderful mirth:
It was filled with so many of His little idols—man.
He had made this one thing in His image.
It was like Himself in the first rough power of
youth.

It considered the various suns
And the other things He had made
As its own.

It was not afraid even of Him.

And that was the truth.

He smoked and smoked.

He wondered why He had cared

BANNERS

ET LE BON DIEU PENSA—*continued*

To give it more than He gave
To the nebulous worlds
Or the lightning
Or the fierce lovable brutes.
He wondered how He had dared.
For man was the cleverest creature He had made,
And the meanest, too.
And He sighed, sitting up there in heaven,
Over His pipe,
And all He had intended to do.
Now He was middle-aged,
Probably that was the reason
He felt so old and despaired
Of all the fine traps He had laid
And the poor things He had caught and caged.
But He took another long pull,
And He thought again,
There were all the stars,
And the planets,
There was the sun, and the moon that was dead.
There was that fantastic earth,
And its multiple creatures,
Forever dying and forever coming to birth,
The monstrous tropic beasts,
The ocean's million fins,



BANNERS

ET LE BON DIEU PENSA—*continued*

The million wings that fan the ambient air,
The numberless exquisite microscopic, everywhere.
And there was still man.
God laughed noiselessly, as only God can.
He was wondering why
He had made man at all,
So, His thought wandering to the story of the fall,
He reached out carelessly and plucked an apple
Of pale golden lustre, from the sky.
And as He munched with solemn satisfaction
He was still bothered by the mystery
Of His small idol.
For it was intricate and delicate
And had an ancient history
Bloody and beautiful and adventurous.
And God wondered why He had made it thus,
And why He was in such simple slavery
To the thing He had made.
He threw away the core,
And felt His years, and just a touch afraid.
He thought of His long sacrifice to man,
And how He had bowed to this idol,
Fasted and prayed,
And shaken before its power,
And how He had had faith



BANNERS

ET LE BON DIEU PENSA—*continued*

When it showed only wrath and empty hands,
And how when all He had done seemed gone for
nought

He felt that man, His idol, understands.

He remembered darkly His creature furious

Because He had scorned it,

And how with rich burnt offering He had sought
To appease it.

And He thought how it was hungry, wilful, curi-
ous,

And it was the image of Himself that He had
wrought.

And then He thought

In His infinite wisdom

That if He had not made this creature

Man would have made himself.

God needed no preacher

To tell Him this. He was at least as wise as you.

And in His wisdom He laughed to think that that
was true.

And so God pondered, smoking,

And smiling, in heaven.

But it was getting late, so He arose

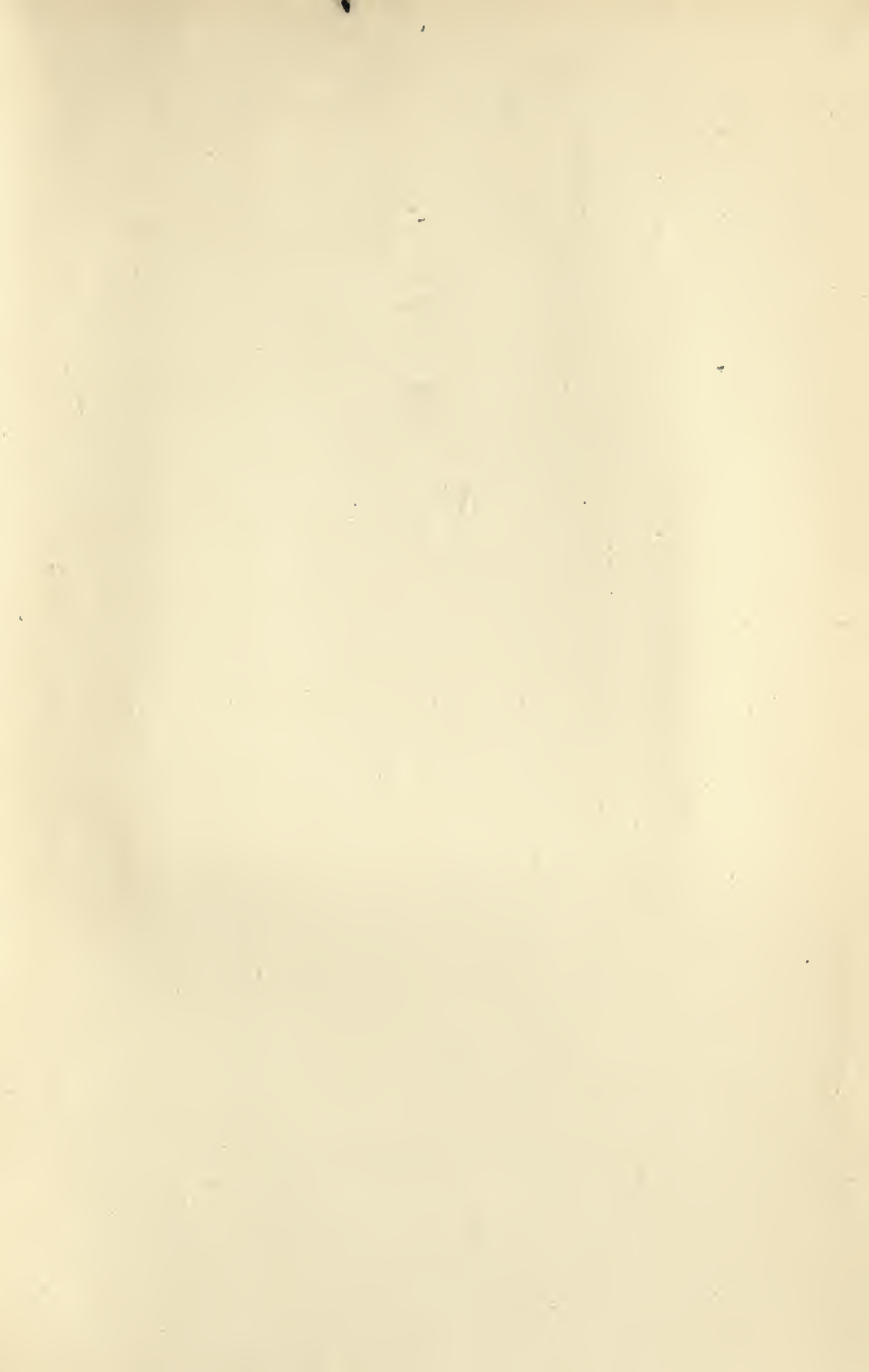
And yawned with His whole body

And decided

BANNERS

ET LE BON DIEU PENSA—*continued*

That, being middle-aged, He had to sleep.
And tho He never derided prayer,
He was sure
His idol would forgive Him if He went
To His pleasant couch without that sacrament.
But before He slept He looked with all His eyes
At the distant earth,
And blessed with all His heart
Man and his works,
That were the best part of God's own youth.
And on that mystery
He turned and went to bed and slumbered deep,
Without dreams.
God is now middle-aged.
But He is still beautiful asleep.





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